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Image Ray Archer

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The Waiting Game

Interview Geoff Meyer Images Ray Archer/Monster Energy

For Monster Energy Yamaha rider Romain Febvre, the 2017 season has not been a good one. While the defence of his title in 2016 was up and down, this season has pretty much been down. Holding eight place in the MXGP points race, the Frenchman is showing signs of coming back to his best, but still even a podium finish seems a long way off. The 2015 world MXGP champion did score a third-place finish in the second moto in Qatar, but since his best result has been two fourth place finishes in moto's in Argentina, and France. Everyone hopes the friendly Yamaha rider can regain his speed of 2015 and in parts of 2016, and maybe it will take a big score in Russia this weekend to get the ball rolling.







Motocross Illustrated: How did you feel coming into this season?

Febvre: I didn't feel different coming into this season. Everyone told me I would have pressure in 2016 and I didn't have that. I didn't have any pressure on myself. This year I was ready to fight for the title and I wanted to do the best every single round of the championship.

Motocross Illustrated: You had moments in 2017, also a good Motocross of Nations, but in general it was a tough defence of your title, wasn't it?

Febvre: 2016 was difficult. When you come from winning the title and then you have a bad year, it isn't good. I missed two rounds and I knew the championship was gone. Getting injured is part of racing.

Motocross Illustrated: When you arrived back in Europe, it seemed you had fixed your problems, but still Italy didn't go that well?


Febvre: In Trentino, I was happy with my qualification race, I started fifth or sixth, but it was good enough for Sunday. I am really happy with the bike, also in the start. I need to finish on the podium. Sunday, I don't know what to say. I just feel like I don't know why the speed is not there. I will keep working for the future races.

Motocross Illustrated: What was wrong, was it you or the bike?

Febvre: We made some changes to the bike in the winter and we wanted better starts, but racing I struggled with the bike. We improved the start, but racing hasn't gone well. I had good lap times, but I was having trouble with the control and I crashed a lot. In Mexico, I struggled a lot. Then we found there was something on the bike.

Motocross Illustrated: Working with Ryan Hughes in America. Was that a mental thing with yourself, trying to find something in yourself?

Febvre: I learnt a lot from working with Ryan Hughes. I went to America and trained with him and I did



something different in my program. I learnt a lot, but I realized it was the bike and not me. And we found it was the bike that we needed to change.

Motocross Illustrated: In Germany it was another tough experience?

Febvre: Yes, it has been difficult from the beginning of the season. We made some changes to the bike that were not working for me, but we went back and I can play on the bike better now. I thought it was me, because I made the choice, but in the races, I struggled with the changes and we went back and it was late, but everyone can see now it is going nice. I got a bit stuck in the first race. I was faster than my result shows but I couldn't make the pass I needed to make, so I was frustrated. In the second race, I was riding pretty good but I caught my foot on a rut and hurt some ligaments in my ankle. I was in so much pain I thought my foot was broken, but I kept riding. Other than that, I feel much better on the bike and I am really happy with how things are going, I just hope my foot will be okay for next weekend.

Motocross Illustrated: In the last round in France, some good speed, but too many mistakes?

Febvre: I went into Ernee thinking I was capable of a podium. I was very happy with the bike. Going to Ernee it was nice. Every time I go to Ernee or St Jean d'Angely I am excited to be racing. The racing started well on Saturday with second place in the qualifying race, but Sunday, I made a mistake in both races. In the first race, I crashed on the first lap, using a lot of energy. I came back to seventh, the speed was good but I was a little bit too slow to make some of the passes. In the second moto, I started better and then I crashed in front of pit-lane and lost some positions. I then had to come back, and I got back to fourth, close to third, but like I said, I used a lot of energy when I had to come back from the crashes and it was really hot today.









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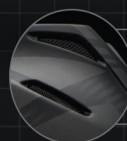
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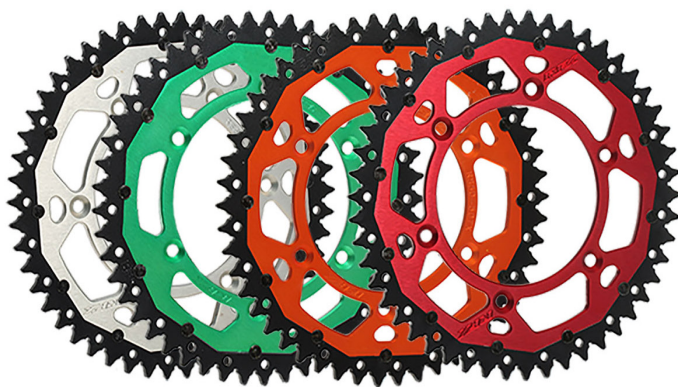
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Gentle Giant

Story David Bulmer images Ray Archer

Arminas Jasikonis, the tallest man in the MXGP paddock has been showing signs of things to come. Down in 13th place in the MXGP championship points, the Lithuanian youngster has shown improvement at each round of this year's series. After failing to race the opening round in Qatar (after visa issues), he scored just five points in the mud in Indonesia, but fought back with 15, 17, 19, 30, 20, 22, and 15 in his last seven rounds.

Had he been able to score similar to his other rounds in that round he missed due to paper work, there is every chance the Suzuki factory rider would be inside the top ten in the toughest class in world motocross.

The highlight being his third place in the second moto of the Latvian Grand Prix. There seems little doubt that the 19-year-old will eventually make a podium finish, whether it be in 2017 or 2018 doesn't really matter, but his potential is there.

For a teenager, racing for his hero, Stefan Everts, in a factory team, the dream is truly alive for the big kid from Lithuania.

Suzuki press guy, and our man at the Grand Prix's, David Bulmer caught up with Arminas, and asked him about his season so far and his future.

Motocross Illustrated: Let's start from the beginning. How did it begin and how has it gone?

Arminas Jasikonis: The season didn't start in the best way. We struggled to get into Qatar, then Indonesia was a big disappointment. We got back to Europe and I did well in Valkenswaard and Kegums, and hard pack we are making top ten, so it's good for me as my first full season. Step by step, I am improving and everything is going good.

Motocross Illustrated: I mean what did you expect coming in. You did well in the pre-seasons, but it's hard to gauge that when not all the top guys are there.

Arminas Jasikonis: I mean, to make a couple of top fives was my point. After Hawkstone Park I could see that I was capable of that. It was to put some top fives and as many top ten as I could.

Motocross Illustrated: How exciting is it to make these big steps, from coming from an unknown rider, getting a factory ride and now getting these results?

Arminas Jasikonis: Its really nice, really nice. When you look at how many people know me, and everything is nice. Race by race better results, it's really good.

Motocross Illustrated: Kevin is out, and all the attention is on you. How does that feel?

Arminas Jasikonis: Even when Kevin was there, it was the same. Kevin is a really good rider and a really good team-mate also. I can learn a lot from him. There isn't much difference, only after the race they need to speak to him and then me, but as far as the bike and everything, it's the same.

Motocross Illustrated: Moving forward. We go to Russian, Italy is a new track, Portugal has changed a little, and maybe you have never ridden there. How are you looking forward to these races?









Arminas Jasikonis: I mean being in Europe, I love Europe. Being in my camper and everything. It's a good feeling, but of course it's also cool to go to the other places. I mean it's nice to see, but still, my feeling isn't the same as when I am in Europe.

Motocross Illustrated: Not a fan of America. You now looking forward to that one?

Arminas Jasikonis: No, America is cool, I was there last year with Suzuki. For a couple of weeks, it's nice, but like Indonesia, that is cool for just a week, not more than that.

Motocross Illustrated: You got a third place in Latvia, in a moto. Did that raise the bar a little in what you expect to achieve?

Arminas Jasikonis: I think it's coming in Assen and Lommel, my key points there. Of course, I will try and do the same, but I really want to improve on the hard pack. I struggle in the starts and that is where I need to improve.

Motocross Illustrated: How difficult is it to practice on hard pack, when you live in Lommel, right in the middle of Belgium.

Arminas Jasikonis: We are trying to do it, but it isn't easy. Finding a hard pack track you need to drive two hours, but we are doing as much of that as possible. We have some hard pack tracks and we can ride them and improve.

Motocross Illustrated: Lithuania, not known as a motocross country. Has you racing the Grand Prix's improved the interest there?

Arminas Jasikonis: I think it has, a lot of people supporting me. Bringing up the level isn't going to be easy, but I hope I am being a good role model that people are looking at it more and it will improve.

Profile Jasikonis

Machine	RM-Z450-WS
Date of Birth	September 12, 1997
Nationality	Lithuanian
Home Town	Balen
Height	1m 96cm
Weight	92kg
Marital Status	Single
Hair Colour	Brown
Eye Colour	Blue
Hobbies	BMX, swimming, cycling
Likes	Sports
Dislikes	Bad races
Favourite Movie	Many ones
Favourite Food	Chinese food
Favourite Circuit	Many
First Race	2001 Lithuanian Championship

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The Search For Speed

Story Geoff Meyer and Dan Lamb Images Monster Energy

Eli Tomac came into the 2017 AMA Nationals as the man with a big target on his back, and after three rounds of rollercoaster results, the Monster Energy Kawasaki rider finds himself not the man, but a man in search for his blazing fast speed. Similar to what has happened to James Stewart throughout his career, sometimes people expect too much, and be it pressure, or confidence, Eli Tomac doesn't always deliver what he is capable of.

After dominating most of the rounds of the 2017 AMA supercross championship he came up short. The same guy who blitzed the best Grand Prix riders in the world at Charlotte, and Glen Helen in 2016, disappeared when they turned up the very same track he peppered the euros with roost.

Here is what he thought of his first-round victory in Hangtown, and his disappointments of Glen Helen and Thunder Valley.

Hangtown: It was big unknown for us coming into here—for the team, for me and everything. It started off really well with that first practice. We got pole position and took the first gate pick into the motos. Moto, one went off and I was buried back there a little bit and I ate a lot of roost early and was struggling. I eventually got to third place but wasn't comfy at all really, and Blake [Baggett] ended up getting me again later on. I didn't have very good lines and was missing some insides—that was disappointing—and then I came back for moto two.

We made a few little changes and came back and went the right direction on one end of the bike but on the other end kind of felt a little bit goofier. I don't know; I was just kind of searching all day in the motos themselves where in practice it was really good feeling. It's something I gotta to work on for sure.

Yeah, I was more surprised at how I felt pressure there. Then, he got me back. When I made the first pass on him, I felt like I had plenty of pace to go by him and probably pull him. Something must have changed;





he got fired up or found some good lines. That was unexpected.

No, no. I think this is my sixth Hangtown now, and there weren't any nerves really. I was just in the zone and ready to go do work. It wasn't anything like last year, but there was no nerves making any problems.

I don't know. I made changes between the motos. In the first moto, I was struggling with one side of the bike, and in the other moto, I was struggling with the other side of the bike. I don't know, maybe it was me that wasn't taking the right lines. There can be improvements from both of us to get to the front of the pack.

Glen Helen: It just wasn't in the cards for us today. The team and I were in a good spot today and my bike felt great during qualifying, but just had some bad luck when the gate dropped. It's a long season and we'll be back next weekend.

Thunder Valley: Not quite the day we wanted. After some bad luck in Moto 1, I got a great start in the second moto but struggled to find smooth lines and ended up getting passed and finishing second. We'll work hard over the weekend off and will be ready for the east coast tracks."

Now with a weekends rest, let's all hop the Kawasaki rider can return to his best in round four, and put the fight to the likes of series leader Marvin Musquin, and Thunder Valley winner Blake Baggett.



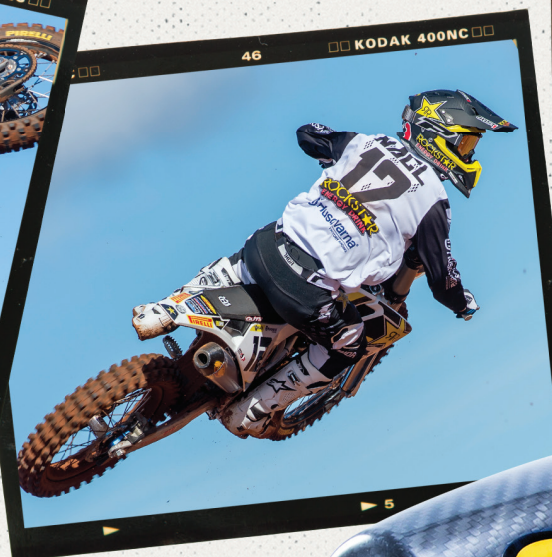


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Marvin The Magnificent

Red Bull KTM Factory rider Marvin Musquin has proven more than a capable replacement as the top man in the orange team. With his good friend Ryan Dungey retired, the Frenchman seems to be enjoying the roll of leader, as he takes the AMA 450 championship red plate into the fourth round in a week's time. Last weekend at the Thunder Valley circuit Musquin didn't, win, but his runner-up spot was a nice encore to his victory a week earlier in Glen Helen. Up until now he has gone 2-1-2 and is doing his best Dungey impersonation as the most consistent rider in the class.







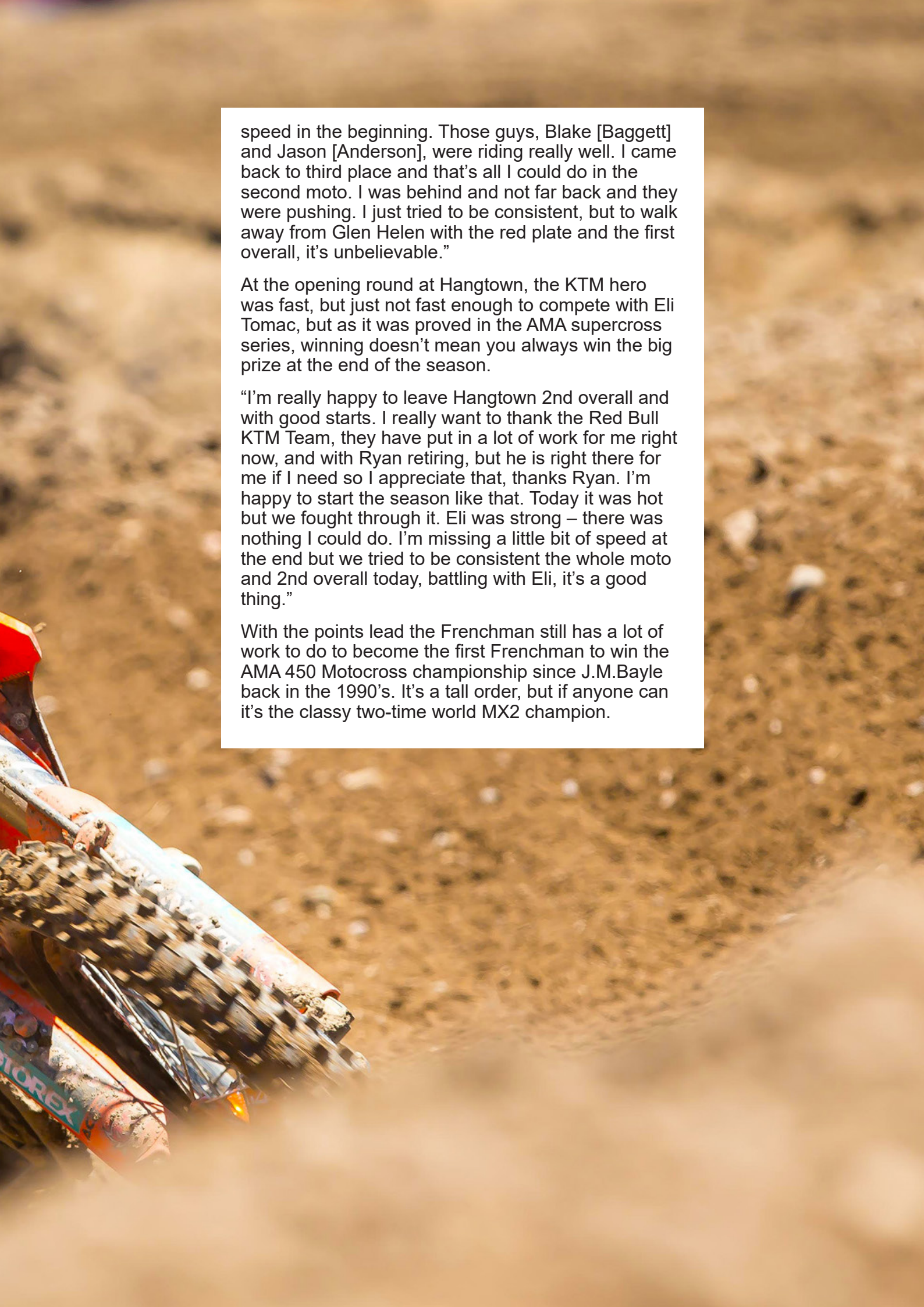


"Practice went super good in Thunder Valley. It was really nice, but I knew the track was going to get harder. Here, they always get deep ruts and the inside gets soft and crusty on top. It's rough, but a good track. My starts were not really good, especially in that first moto. Unfortunately, Josh Grant went down in front of us and I couldn't avoid him. From pretty far back to fourth place, was awesome. In the second moto I wish I had a better start to battle with [Blake] Baggett and [Eli] Tomac, but I think Baggett was faster today. Speed wise, he was on it today, but I wish I was with Eli. Eli got better in that second moto. But to get third in that second moto was god considering the start. We need better starts but here at high altitude—starting in first gear—I struggled. I couldn't get a good jump. That's why it was a tough day. It put me in a tough position and I had to fight really hard. But that's what we do. I gave 100% and it was good to get second overall."

For Musquin, the Glen Helen circuit is something special. Victory and the points lead was enough to make the always friendly European smile just that little harder.

"Yeah, obviously the goal is to try and win, especially after last weekend and getting second. Glen Helen is a unique track and to be able to win that first moto is incredible. I got the holeshot and rode pretty good—just consistent—and was able to grab my first ever win in the outdoors on the 450. In the second moto I really wanted to get a good start. I knew it was going to be tough. Rough and physically tough. Unfortunately—I was in the top ten—I was not in a good position to fight for the win. I was missing a little bit of





speed in the beginning. Those guys, Blake [Baggett] and Jason [Anderson], were riding really well. I came back to third place and that's all I could do in the second moto. I was behind and not far back and they were pushing. I just tried to be consistent, but to walk away from Glen Helen with the red plate and the first overall, it's unbelievable."

At the opening round at Hangtown, the KTM hero was fast, but just not fast enough to compete with Eli Tomac, but as it was proved in the AMA supercross series, winning doesn't mean you always win the big prize at the end of the season.

"I'm really happy to leave Hangtown 2nd overall and with good starts. I really want to thank the Red Bull KTM Team, they have put in a lot of work for me right now, and with Ryan retiring, but he is right there for me if I need so I appreciate that, thanks Ryan. I'm happy to start the season like that. Today it was hot but we fought through it. Eli was strong – there was nothing I could do. I'm missing a little bit of speed at the end but we tried to be consistent the whole moto and 2nd overall today, battling with Eli, it's a good thing."

With the points lead the Frenchman still has a lot of work to do to become the first Frenchman to win the AMA 450 Motocross championship since J.M.Bayle back in the 1990's. It's a tall order, but if anyone can it's the classy two-time world MX2 champion.

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